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“WHOM NOT HAVING SEEN YE LOVE.”

ONCE a year is none too often to meditate upon the meaning of Christ's coming into the world. As his followers have loved to commemorate his resurrection on each Easter day, *THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS* so it has seemed fitting since the early centuries to commemorate his birth on Christmas day. The world needed Christ. It needed the conception of God as a loving Father of men which Jesus brought. It needed the teaching concerning righteousness that Jesus gave. It needed his hopeful outlook for the future. It needed the meaning which he found in life. It needed the impelling and persuasive example which Jesus set. It needed the forgiveness of sin and the communion with God which Jesus accomplished. The presence of these facts and forces which came with the advent of Christ made a new era in the progress of humanity and lifted the world to a sublimer plane. We cannot too often consider what a blessing the gospel was to the generation which first welcomed it, and the blessing which the gospel has been to every succeeding generation, including our own. To study the history of the Christian centuries for the purpose of observing what Christianity has accomplished for civilization is one of the grandest studies which we can make, and one of the most convincing arguments for the historical trustworthiness of the New Testament which records the beginnings of Christianity. We shall not fulfil the opportunity of the Christmas season unless we give ourselves with special devotion to the contemplation of Christ in all his divine glory, character, and work. In such a contemplation is the highest uplift of soul and life.

It is with these beautiful words that the apostle John (1 John 4:19) expressed the true conception of the origin of the love we feel for God, and the love we feel for Christ is closely linked with the other in its origin and in its nature. That "God is love" is the fundamental truth of the relation which exists between God and the universe. Creation is itself an expression of the love of God, and man was made out of God's love in order that he might be the recipient of that love. The love therefore which we feel for him and for Christ as the incarnate God is a reciprocal love. It is inevitable as soon as one recognizes the meaning of life and the relation in which he stands to his Creator and Father. It was one aspect of the life and work of Jesus to bring men to realize that the world exists in and by love, and that the perfect realization of love in all ways will bring the accomplishment of God's great purpose for the universe. So that no man has attained a complete maturity until he has made his own character and his own service a complete expression of the love which God made the foundation of his creation. We cannot isolate ourselves from Him any more than we can isolate ourselves from our fellow-men. We must find that true relation which will co-ordinate our lives with the world and with God.

The sincere soul experiences a spontaneous love for Christ as soon as he appears to the soul's vision. In some cases this vision of Christ comes in early years through the teaching of the parents or of the Sunday-school teacher; and this is the best way in which to receive it. In other cases no true vision of Christ is reached until mature years, when it is found for the first time in a study of the gospels, or it may be through the lives of saintly people with whom one has been thrown. But when one who is in search of goodness, truth and hope comes fully upon Jesus, the appreciation of him is immediate. One finds in him the realization of ideals, the answer to the most vital questions of life, the savior from sin, and the bearer of joy and hope. No wonder, then, that love responds. To know life as he knew it, to love as he taught us to love, and with him to trust and hope for the

future, is to transport a man from an uncertain and unattractive existence to a life full of meaning and full of happiness. May this Christmas bring a vision of Christ to countless numbers of people, old and young, who have not yet attained it and so secure to them a blessed existence here and hereafter.

What is the experience of love for Christ? How does it affect one's inner self, and how does it manifest itself in one's conduct? The first phase of the experience is in most cases a sense of relief—a relief from doubt, anxiety, and profound unrest. This is because one finds in him a true peace in all perplexities, and a supreme purpose which can absorb one's life. This experience is followed by another—the feeling of gratitude and self-committal in which one gives one's self with joy and confidence to Christ to become what he would have him be. The fundamental ideas and motives of existence are thus directed to the achievement of the highest ideal for humanity. One then finds in Christ himself the perfect exemplification of this ideal concretely realized, and sets himself to follow in the footsteps of his Master. Out of this transformation of the inner life grow a character and a service which increasingly give perfect expression to the true self. To think and to will goodness and truth is to realize goodness and truth in one's personal life and social relations. So we realize in time the full significance of our love for Christ and secure to it a full expression.

To the apostle Peter who had been with Jesus during his public ministry, and who had witnessed the events of his crucifixion and resurrection, it seemed remarkable that those who had not had this great privilege of being with Jesus should none the less have loved him. Writing to men who were far from Palestine, but who had welcomed Christ through the preaching of the gospel by Christian missionaries, the apostle commends their faith in him "whom not having seen ye love" (1 Peter 1:8). We recall at once the words of Jesus to Thomas: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have

believed" (John 20:29). And through the succeeding centuries countless hosts of Christians have loved Him whom they have not seen. After all, it is not so strange that we should follow our spiritual sight more willingly than our physical sight. He who lives wholly in what his eyes see has a shallow life indeed. It has always been the characteristic of the noblest men to fix their thought and their aspirations upon that which is beneath the surface of things, to find the meaning of life and their own destiny in the unseen. How clearly the apostle Paul expressed this thought when he said: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). Here, indeed, is the secret of life. To find those things which are eternally true and good, and to commit one's self wholly to them, is to enter the realm of perfect well-being. In this realm no life can fail to fulfil its largest possibilities and to perform its complete mission. The Christmas season will have brought us blessing and inspiration if it lifts us once more to the unseen, and causes us to renew our grasp upon the spiritual realities of the universe. The way of peace and well-being is to hold fast to Him "whom not having seen we love."